

October 7, 1964

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Dear Howard:

I hasten to answer your letter of the 29th.

I am sure you know how deeply I share your concerns and aspirations. For a time I would also have endorsed the idea of a center or an elite committee, but I have since come to the conclusion that the analysis of policy for man is too important to be left to such a device or to such similar measures as the operation of government committees, and so forth. I would be very happy at the stimulus that your group is affording to deeper thought on this policy, but I cannot support the idea of any restricted forum when the subject should be the proper business of every university on earth. Nor do I see how any entity short of a university can properly focus the full breadth of human culture, none of which is irrelevant to policy for man. Any energy or effort that I or any member of any other university would lend to another organization must detract from what he would be able to do at home, and this is the essential reason for my reservations. Quite possibly the different institutional environments in which we now find ourselves may help to color our respective outlooks, and I would hardly want to find myself in a position of discouraging any constructive activity that others may wish to undertake.

Actually, even the university may be too restrictive a forum except insofar as it is in close communication with the whole society, which is to say that its leadership must be effective.

I would foresee one particular difficulty on which any centralized activity is very likely to bog down. People will join their minds, even over long periods of time, when there are specific courses of action in view as a consequence of their deliberations. This may be no more than issues of curriculum or more general educational policy; in other contexts it may be in a specific advisory capacity for governmental or other social action. Unless as an alternative you foresee some means of inculcating the fervor of a new religion, I would caution that this is another serious lack in the proposals.

In my own experience I have found the most cogent criticism of some of my general ideas more from students and fellows that I have talked to than panels, symposia and committees of specialists on the two cultures.

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You may be interested in a memorandum of a recent meeting of the Fellows of the Markle Foundation that brought out a couple of issues rather more clearly than I had perceived them before.

Yours, as ever,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics